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NEWS

Rally calls for easing of strict visitor rules at Nova Scotia long-term care homes

By Jesse Thomas • Global News
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Rally calls on Nova Scotia to ease strict visitor policies at long-term care homes – Aug 20, 2020

Veterans Memorial Building Thursday.

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Families are calling on the province and Nova Scotia Health to loosen visitor

restrictions to allow family more time with their loved ones. As it stands right now, families are granted one 30 minute visit per week.

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Pre-COVID-19, Stanislow says her mother Claire acted as a family caregiver for her father Frank and says her mother helped staff by providing the extra care they couldn't. The family questions why one family member couldn't be designated a caregiver and go inside.

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"I've seen how the screening is done for staff going in the hospital here and it's absolutely nothing that couldn't be done with my mother," she said.

Northwood long-term care home in Halifax was hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, as 53 residents died.

Cheryl Pace's mother lives at Northwood and contracted COVID-19 but survived and now she says her mother is suffering from isolation and the weekly half-hour visit with her mother isn't enough.

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"Mom will say, 'I feel like I'm in a prison,' and she compares it to Dorchester (Penitentiary) but she's not happy, is the thing," says Pace.

Dr. Samir Sinha, a leading geriatrics doctor in Canada and director of geriatrics at Sinai Health in Toronto, says protecting patients and allowing them the freedom to see their family is a fine balance.

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Sinha says the pandemic has revealed just how integral the role of a family caregiver is inside a long-term care home.

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"I think now we started realizing very quickly on, as we locked these homes down, that my goodness, we might have lost 50 per cent of the care that was actually occurring in these homes on an unpaid basis by family caregivers and friends," said Sinha.

Heather White, the director of veterans' services and geriatrics at Camp Hill Veterans Memorial Building, says staff are doing their best, but she recognizes the support families bring.

"We feel the impact of not having families here in many, many ways," said White. "Recognizing that safety is a top priority right now, we have to keep following the guidelines and as a health authority, Nova Scotia Health is

continuing to work closely with the government as to how some of those restrictions will be eased safely."

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Sinha says there's evidence in other jurisdictions in Canada, like Quebec, that shows family caregivers can come into long-term care homes and provide support to staff and don't pose a threat for COVID-19 infection when trained on proper health and safety guidelines.

"It been shown that if we train and support our staff to work safely in these settings, why wouldn't we actually do the same with these family caregivers, whose prime reason they are there is because they love the person they are trying to see and they don't want to cause any harm to the people that they see," said Sinha.

The organizers of the rally say they'll continue to protest until they see a change in the visitation policy.

Canadian cases

CONFIRMED	DEATHS	AT LEAST ONE DOSE	FULLY VACCINATED
1,421,127	26,439	78.68% of Canadians aged 12+	50.22% of Canadians aged 12+

Source: Esri Canada

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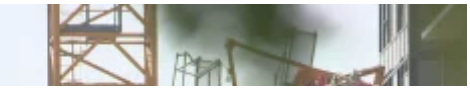

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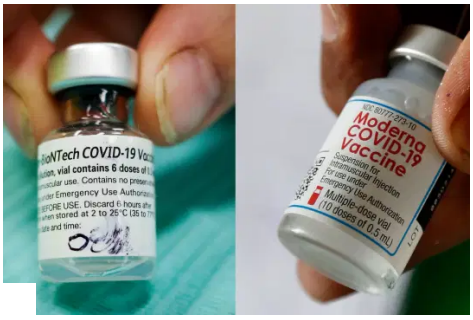

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